



AUTUMN

Out with the old

John MacLeod



On January 1, 2002, a new set of climatological normals went into effect for Little Rock and most stations in Arkansas. The normals are for temperature, precipitation, heating and cooling degree days. A degree day is determined by using the average temperature for the day and comparing it to 65. If the average temperature is above 65, the difference between these two numbers is referred to as heating degree days. The same rule applies if the average temperature is below 65 but are called cooling degree days.

These normals were based on the 30 year period from 1971 through 2000. All temperature, precipitation, and degree day statistics for this 30 year period were averaged and then normalized on a 30 year curve, or smoothed out into a smooth curve. Comparisons to normal will be made against these figures for the next 10 years or so.



The old normals were in use since January 1, 1993 and were based on a 30 year period from 1961 through 1990. The new normals will likely remain in effect through December 31, 2011.

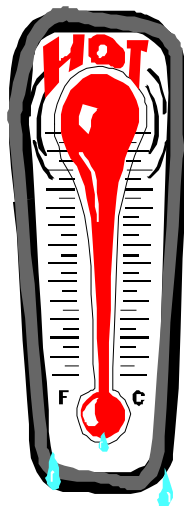
Normals for temperature, precipitation, and cooling degree days are for a January through December year and are divided into monthly and daily normals. Normals for heating degree days are for a year running from July through June. Due to this set up, the new normals for cooling degree days did not go into effect until July, 2002.



Normals usually do not change significantly from one decade to another. However, that was not the case this time in regard to temperature and degree days. The new normal temperatures are considerably higher than the previous normals. Normal temperatures for most months are 1.5 to 2.5 degrees higher than

they were and normal annual temperatures are about 1.5 degrees higher at most stations in Arkansas. As a result of this, normal heating degree days are considerably lower than they were and normal cooling degree days are considerably higher.

The main reason for this is that the old normals, based on 1961 through 1990 averages, sampled the three coolest decades on record. Normal temperatures in many areas were the coolest ever. Most normal temperatures were lower than the long term average temperatures since climate records began, which was in July, 1879 for Little Rock. The new normals, based on 1971 through 2000 averages, still samples two cool decades but now include the 1990s which was one of the warmest decades ever. The 1991 through 2000 period was much warmer than the 1961 through 1970 period, thus the averages used to compute normal temperatures for 1971 through 2000 were much higher than they were for the 1961 through 1990 period.



Continued on Page 9